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An Interview With President Reagan on Campaign Questions

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WASHINGTON, March 28 — Following are excerpts from a White House transcript of an interview with President Reagan today by Francis X. Clines and Steven R. Weisman:

Assistance to Rebellion

Q. About Central America, Mr. President. I wonder if I could ask you to explain or justify how the United States can go about assisting people who are, as you called them, freedom fighters, who are seeking to overthrow a Government that we have diplomatic relations with and answer, if you could, critics who are worried that this is increasing our involvement in Central America.

A. Well, the answer to that is, first of all, this particular Government of Nicaragua is a government that was set up by force of arms and the people have never chosen it. It's a revolutionary government. And that Government, in violation of its pledge to us at a time when it was a revolutionary force trying to become a government, had promised that it would not aid the guerrillas in El Salvador who are attempting to overthrow a duly elected government and a democratic government. And they have violated that. The guerrillas are literally being directed from bases near Managua. They're being supplied by that Government. And the other factor, why I have referred to them on occasion as freedom fighters, is because many of them are elements of the same revolution that put the Sandinista Government in force.

The revolution against the Somoza dictatorship and our Government, under the previous Administration, sat back and never lifted a finger on behalf of Somoza and then when the fighting was over did start to give financial aid to the revolutionary government to help it install itself. And had to cancel that when it discovered what that government was doing. During the revolution against Somoza, the revolutionaries appealed to the Organization of American States, of which we are a member also, to ask Somoza to step down and end the bloodshed. And the Organization of American States asked for a statement of what were the goals of the revolution. And they were provided: Democracy, a pluralistic government, free elections, free labor unions, freedom of the press, human rights observed — those were the goals of the revolution, submitted in writing to the Organization of American States.

'Followed Pattern' of Castro

After they got in, they followed the pattern that was followed by Castro in Cuba. Those other elements, who were not Sandinista, other groups who wanted and they thought all of the same thing, democracy. To rid themselves of a dictatorship. Those elements were denied participation in the government. Arrests were made. There were some who were exiled and there were some, I'm afraid, who were executed. And many of the people now fighting as so-called Contras are elements of the revolution. And it is less an overthrow that they're fighting for as it is a demand that they be allowed to participate in the government and that the government keep its promises as to what it had intended for the people.

And I see no dichotomy in our supporting the Government, the democratic government of El Salvador and the Contras here — and we made it plain to Nicaragua — made it very plain that this would stop when they keep their promise and restore the democratic rule and have elections. Now, they've finally been pressured, the pressure's led them to saying they'll have an election. I think they've scheduled it for next November. But there isn't anything yet to indicate that that election will be anything but the kind of rubber stamp that we see in any totalitarian government. There aren't any rival candidates, there aren't any rival parties and how would they campaign without a free press?

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